

**Oral History Interview with
Vito DeVito Francesco**

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Vito DeVito Francesco Summary

Vito DeVito Francesco was born in 1940 to an Italian immigrant family in Ontario, California. His father came from Italy to the United States and owned vineyards in the Rancho Cucamonga area. Francesco describes the beginnings of the family business and his own involvement assisting with paperwork and managing fieldworkers. He also discusses different varieties of wine grapes, other growers and vintners in the area, and the origins of the California Association of Wine Grape Growers, of which he was a founding member.

Subject Headings

California Association of Wine Grape Growers

Convict labor

Foreign workers, Mexican--United States

Italian Americans

Viticulture—California

Wine and wine making—California

Zinfandel (Wine)

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Vito DeVito Francesco

August 20, 2007

Interview Conducted by Danette Cook Adamson

Transcribed by Andy Kung

Beginning of Part 1 of 3

DCA: [This is] Danette Cook Adamson, and it is August 20, 2007. Would you introduce yourself?

VDF: Vito Francesco.

DCA: Well, Mr. Francesco, is that, I'm used to thinking of you—since we have your family's historic great [inaudible] label on display and it says "Nick DeVito and Son"—I was thinking of you in my mind ahead of time as Mr. DeVito, but you're actually, that's a middle name you told me and that the surname for the family is Francesco, so.

VDF: You can use either one; it's ok.

DCA: We're so delighted that you had time in your schedule to come be with us today and as we understand, you and your family were in the grape growing business for many years in the Ontario, Cucamonga Area.

VDF: That's correct.

DCA: So, we'd love to learn more, and I might start by asking where was the address and the location of your vineyards?

VDF: Well we were all the way from Ontario to Fontana.

DCA: What would be the street boundaries that you could recall?

VDF: I think we went all the way from Archibald, all the way over to—

DCA: That's the west edge.

VDF: Yeah, all the way over to Sierra Avenue in Fontana.

DCA: And what would be the south boundary?

VDF: The south boundary, we probably were Mission Boulevard.

DCA: And to the north?

VDF: To the north, we went as far up as Highland Avenue.

DCA: So, were they all contiguous acres or did they all—?

VDF: No, they were all spread out.

DCA: Spread out.

VDF: Some here and some there.

DCA: Where was your largest mass of acreage?

VDF: Well we had, well we had what is known today as the Lewis property, Louis Homes, and that was from Haven all the way over to Rochester and then from Foothill over to Baseline and then they had another parcel that went from Baseline north to the railroad tracks.

DCA: So, did Lewis purchase that from your family?

VDF: No, Lewis purchased that from a company in New York. I forget what that company was; I think it was the First City Bank of New York. They bought that; they bought a couple thousand acres there all the way from Haven all the way over to Rochester and then past Rochester they owned a piece also. So, they had like 1500 acres in that area that was homes purchased and we were farming it before Lewis purchased it and we continued farming it after Lewis purchased it.

DCA: I think you mentioned it to me earlier when we were talking, that you had approximately 4,000 acres of vineyard.

VDF: Then there was another big block that was owned by, well at one time it was owned by the [inaudible] Poly, the construction company. And then it went into the hands of some other developers. And then part of it was purchased by the Los Angeles Airport and that was along Haven Avenue, from Haven over to Milliken. And then on the other side of Milliken and then that was a couple thousand acres in there because there was a strip that ran all the way from the San Bernardino freeway clear down to Mission Boulevard.

DCA: So, when did these vineyards come to the possession of your family? How long, and when did they part with them?

VDF: Well we were, we were basically leasing the vineyards from different property owners and the property owners were buying and selling so it's hard to define exactly when one parcel came in because we would—

DCA: So, you were not the owners of the 4,000 acres?

VDF: No, we were not the owners of the land, we were the lessees, we would lease the property from the owners.

DCA: Was there any vineyard that you did own?

VDF: In the old days, but not in the recent times.

DCA: When you said old days, when was that?

VDF: When my father first started, he owned a lot of property way back when.

DCA: Tell me, when, how did your family start in the area? When was that?

VDF: *[laughs]* Well that's an old story. When my father first came here, he started working in the railroads, laying railroad tracks back in Chicago with his father and so after he did that for a while then when he heard about California and about the agriculture here in California, so then he moved, he came to California with his father.

DCA: What year would that be?

VDF: Well it would probably be around 1930. And then they went down to Coachella Valley because that was the first area Coachella *[inaudible]* where the grapes came in. That was the first, when grapes mature, that was the earliest maturing area of the state.

DCA: So, he arrived in the *[Great]* Depression in this area.

VDF: So, they went, him and his father and other people went down, and they were working in the fields picking grapes.

DCA: Harvesting.

VDF: Harvesting grapes, and just like common laborers today. And in those days the banks, I don't know if they had banks, but anyhow, the system was that the owner would either say what he owed you for working and pay you at the end of the season or he'd pay you every week. And so, since my father didn't have a bank account, he just told the man he was working for—who happened to be a man by the name of Dr. Ford—he told Dr. Ford, “Just keep my money and then you can pay me at the end of the season.”

So, they harvested grapes and then the season ended. So, Dr. Ford told my dad, “I owe you” whatever it was and, “Do you want me to give you the money now?”

And my dad said, “Yeah because I want to go to Los Angeles.” Because from there he was going to go back to Chicago.

And so Dr. Ford said, “Look, I owe you X amount of money” whatever it was, he said, “Instead of me paying you what I owe you, there's that truck over there and it's got a load of grapes on it.” He said, “I'll give you the pink slip to the truck and I'll give you a pink slip, or give you a bill of sale, for the grapes.” He said, “You can take the truck and the grapes, drive it to Los

Angeles, and when you get to Los Angeles, sell the grapes at the Jobber's Market, and sell the truck and then you can go back to Chicago."

So, my dad said, "Alright," because he wanted to go to Los Angeles anyway. So, Dr. Ford gave him the pink slip to the truck, and he gave him the bill of sale to the grapes and my dad drove it to the Jobber's Market. And when he got there, he sold the grapes to the guy at the Jobber's Market and he sold the truck and he went back to Chicago.

But in that process, a lightbulb went off in his head. And he said, "You know, we were picking grapes in Coachella and the grapes were only worth" whatever, let's say a dollar a box for example, and said, "when I took the truck to the Jobber's Market I get, for example, five dollars a box, so he said I gained four dollars from here to there." So, then the following year he came back, and he said, "I'm not going to pick grapes anymore, that's what I'm going to do."

In those days, the credit was a lot easier. And so, the system was that the farmer would say, "Okay here's the grapes, go sell them, and then bring me back the money you owe me." So that's what he started doing. He started taking the grapes from Coachella to the Jobber's Market, selling them there, and then go driving back, pay the grower, pick up some more grapes. So, he started doing that. Then he got involved with the Jobber's Market, and became a manager of the Market, I think it was the Seventh Street Market that he was in [inaudible] manager of for a while, and then he came back to Chicago or went back to Chicago, married my mother, came back to Ontario and settled in Ontario.

DCA: And about what time was that?

VDF: This all happened around 1935, '40 and through there.

DCA: Just to get some names now, he went by Nick DeVito on his label but what was his full name?

VDF: Nick DeVito Francesco.

DCA: And your mom's name?

VDF: Mary.

DCA: Alright, now where were you born?

VDF: Here in Ontario, well up in San Antonio Hospital. I was born here.

DCA: What year?

VDF: 1940.

DCA: So, you grew up in the Ontario or Upland-Cucamonga area?

VDF: Actually, the first year of my life, I lived on the ranch that my dad owned in Mira Loma.

DCA: Oh right. What property did he end up purchasing when he came back here?

VDF: Well, he said several pieces. I think he ended up with a thousand acres of land in and around the Ontario, Cucamonga, Mira Loma area.

DCA: So, your first home you say was in Mira Loma?

VDF: Right, for the first year of my life, and then we moved. Then he bought a house in Ontario and—

DCA: Where was that location?

VDF: On Fourth and Euclid, Northeast Corner, Fourth and Euclid, across from [inaudible] High School.

DCA: Prime real estate.

VDF: So, we been there ever since. That's the family compound.

DCA: That's a beautiful street.

VDF: Yeah, so that's—

DCA: So, do you have any memories growing up in Ontario and the Cucamonga area?

VDF: Yeah well, when the first things I remember is that Ontario had a lot of orange groves. And there were orange groves right on Euclid Avenue and—when I walk to school because I went to St. George's Catholic School—when you walk from Fourth of Euclid to Saint George, you go down Euclid Avenue and you go by the orange groves. And then there was an orange grove right next to Chaffey High School where—so there I just remember there was a lot of orange groves and a lot of open lots and poppies. There were all kinds of poppies growing on Euclid Avenue, and the people would chop down the poppies because they were weeds and now today you can't find any poppies, but they're really rare but there used to be a lot of poppies on Euclid Avenue. Right there on the median, right next to the, between the sidewalk and the street there's like a six foot or eight foot [inaudible].

DCA: Beautifully landscaped.

VDF: Yeah, very, and the grass was not there at that time.

DCA: Where the grass was, it grew poppies.

VDF: Right.

DCA: Beautiful.

VDF: Lot of poppies.

DCA: Now, where, how far over did vineyards come? Where did the vineyards start?

VDF: Well the vineyards as far as they were.

DCA: Over near where Archibald was?

VDF: Yeah, the first vineyard was in—I think the first vineyard in Ontario that I remember was actually on Vineyard Avenue. There was a block of vineyard there that—

DDA: Would this be south of the 10 [Interstate 10] or north of the 10?

VDF: North of the 10, and today it goes from the 10 freeway or that block. It's not Vineyard anymore—from the 10 to 4th street and from Vineyard Avenue all the way to Archibald. And that property at one time, and I don't know whether if it still is, but it was owned by the Meredith Brothers, Meredith Construction Company from Anaheim. And they owned about 250 acres there. As I remember, that was the first vineyard or the closest vineyard to Ontario. Well, actually, that is Ontario.

DCA: We've interviewed the Romolo family, and I believe they had a winery close to that.

VDF: On Fourth and Archibald was the Romolo Winery.

DCA: I think it's close to Vineyard, I think.

VDF: It was Fourth Street and Archibald, the south, southwest corner, southeast corner. Romolo had a winery there.

DCA: So, you mentioned Saint George. What were some other schools you attended?

VDF: Well from Saint George, I went to Chaffey High School, and then from Chaffey High School I went to USC [University of Southern California] and then from USC to Loyola Law School.

DCA: And you, instead of, well if we could go through your involvement with the family business that started in the 19—I mean just you were born in the 19—

VDF: '40s.

DCA: '40s. And so, you grew up with the family business and how long did you stay with the family business?

VDF: All the time. I don't think I ever left it; it's what we did. We went from farming, and then we got into real estate, and then—

DCA: You mentioned memories of a ranch. Where was it that you grew up? Well you said that you were located on Euclid.

VDF: Well, the first year of my life or the first two years we were in Mira Loma and it's on—I think was Marley Avenue, [inaudible] Avenue and Marley Avenue. There was, there were vineyards there and my father purchased one of the vineyards there. And there was a home on there and actually, that's where I spent the first year or second year of my life. And then when I was, like, two years old, they bought the property on Fourth and Euclid and that's where—

DCA: Then each day, you would drive out to what location to be working with the vineyards?

VDF: Wherever, because like I said, we were spread out all over. So, in the morning you just went to where you needed to be.

DCA: Through your teens, you worked on—what types of job did you do for the vineyard?

VDF: Well basically, in the beginning stages I did all the paperwork. I did all the correspondence, all the leases, contracts, making sure all the insurances were proper and all that kind of stuff.

DCA: Very good preparation for your future legal background.

VDF: So, I did all of that, all the paperwork that needed to be done. and then if my father needed somebody in the vineyards. I used to run the crews cause if you needed somebody to run a crew, I knew how to run a crew for [inaudible].

DCA: At what age were you doing these responsibilities?

VDF: Well, I probably started as soon as I was in college, I remember doing that as soon as I graduated from USC, I think. I got in there—when I was in law school, I couldn't do it. But as soon as I graduated from law school, it seems like I was in practice for a while and then I practiced law for 15 years, 10, 15 years. And then my father lost his eyesight because of diabetes and then I had to take over everything.

DCA: What year would that be?

VDF: I don't remember the year.

DCA: The 60s?

VDF: Probably around there, about '70, 1970.

DCA: Where you really had to take over the business from your dad. Going back to when you were running crews, tell us about how you got your workers, your vineyard workers.

VDF: That's a really a phenomenon that's hard to understand and I still don't understand it. But it seems like that when harvest time came, the people would show up. Now we used to have—

DCA: Were these local people?

VDF: Yeah, well I don't know where they really came from. They were well basically—I would say some were local some were migrant. But there were certain people that we used to call foreman. They were the foreman. And the foreman, somehow or another, had connections with these people. Now where they, how they found them, or what the connection was, I don't know. The foreman would know. let's say September is coming or—and then they would just know that they were going to be needed. You know, I mean it was really—

DCA: Certain time of the year they would [inaudible] to show up.

VDF: Right, right, they would know it's [that] time of the year. So, they would come by the house and say, "Well, when are we going to get started?"

DCA: So, you never had to go out to a migrant labor camp to find people?

VDF: We didn't have to recruit or anything like that. It was really—that's the one part of the business that's hard to understand because it just happened that these people knew that they were going to be needed. They knew who their growers were, and they would just gravitate to you.

DCA: Would this be during the 1950s that you were seeing this?

VDF: Well, it was all the time right up to the end. Just from the beginning to the end. There was no real recruiting. I mean there was no advertising in the newspaper or putting out the word or anything like that. It seems that the people knew that there was a need. They knew that's what they did and they would show up. I mean it was just unbelievable. They would be there, they knew that we were going to get started. they knew the grapes were ripe. that was the way they earned their money. and so, they would put people together and show up and say, "Okay where do we go?" and we'd say, "Okay we're going to start over here," and they knew what to do. There was no training or showing them what to do or anything because they just knew.

DCA: Was this part of any known Bracero Program that was in operation during that time period?

VDF: At one time, there was a Bracero Program and the labor camp was on Arrow Highway, and I really don't really remember how many people they had there, but they had a tremendous amount of people and they used to supply a lot of the laborers. But that was a little different system because what you did in those days was like a few were the great grower—you'd have a bus for lack of a better word—and so you would drive up there in the morning and you tell the guy at the labor camp I need 20 people or 30 people and then the guy at the labor camp would

assign 20, 25 or 30 people to you. And they were, quote unquote, be your crew, and every morning you'd go and pick up that group. Now there's no guarantee that the same 25 or 30 people would be there but, more or less be the same. But that's how that worked but that didn't last very long. As I remember it, it lasted a few years.

DCA: So, your dad would've been involved in going and picking up laborers when that program was in effect?

VDF: Yeah, well no—he would have somebody drive “the bus” and go pick them up and take them to the field and after they were all finished, they'd take them back to the labor camp and the labor camp would provide the place for them to stay and would give them breakfast and food and lunches and all that stuff. As I remember, we paid the labor camp. I don't think we paid the men. We paid the labor camp and then the labor camp paid the people. But that was—

DCA: Were there certain standards that they required for the workers as they worked in the field, in terms of water supply or toilets or anything like that?

VDF: That was all controlled by the labor camp. The labor camp would tell you what you needed to have in the field.

DCA: And do you recall what those standards were?

VDF: Well I remember that they had to have drinking water and the portable toilets. I can't remember anything else. But that's what I think they had. But that was a good system because the people, the labor camps seemed to like it. The workers liked it, and the labor camp I guess liked it, because they were getting paid. They never complained and the farmers liked it because there was a supply of people.

And I remember talking to the workers, at least the ones I talked to. And I had the opportunity to talk to a lot of them was the fact that they were happy because they wanted to go back to Mexico. And what they were doing, at least from my experience, is that they were saving their money and as soon as the season was over with, they had no intention of staying here. They wanted to save their money to go back and in fact I remember I asked this one guy, said “what are you going to do when you get back?” “Oh, I'm going to buy me a taxi cab,” because that was his goal, he wanted to work here long enough to save enough money to go back and buy a taxi cab because that's how he figured he could make a living in Mexico.

And then there was another man I remember that I talked to and I asked him, “What are you going to do after the season?” and he says, “I'm going to take my money and I'm going to buy me a little barbershop” because he had his eye on it, a little barbershop in his town and that was what he was going to do. So, they—I don't remember any of them ever told me that they wanted to stay here—all they wanted to do was save their money and at the end of the season go back and get themselves established in Mexico. So, I think it was a pretty good deal for them at that time but at least my experience.

DCA: Did—were there any incidents during the 1960s [and] Cesar Chavez and his movement among farm labor? Did you have any happenings along the terms of organization of labor or any kind of strikes you had to deal with?

VDF: No, not in this area. I just remember from time-to-time there was a shortage because we needed more and more but we never had any problems with the union or anything like that.

DCA: Was the shortage related to union work at all?

VDF: No, it just happened that there was a shortage, for whatever reason. Either there was too much crop or there was too much demand at other areas for the workers or what, but there just happened to be a shortage of people to harvest.

In fact, one time, things were so bad that there was again, the labor supply was short, and we had a phenomenon that there was a storm from Mexico, and it was being—it was affecting our weather. What was happening was, in the morning it would drizzle a little bit and then not much but enough to wet everything and then the afternoon. The sun would come out and that would cause kind of like steam to come out of the ground and it was just really messing up the grapes really bad. And you could see the mold starting to form on the grapes, and when mold gets on the grapes, the wineries don't want them anymore because it affects the wine, and they can't get that taste out of the wine.

So, at the same time there was a phenomenon going on in the Fresno area with the fig growers because when the figs are—when you harvest figs—what you do is you prepare the ground, pack the ground down, and it's really nice and smooth and then the figs drop on the ground and then the figs lay on the ground for a number of time and they dry and then you'd send the pickers in and they'd pick the figs up off the ground.

Well that's great, as long as it's dry. Now that same weather condition was affecting the figs in Fresno and so it was same thing. It would drizzle just a little bit in the morning and wet everything and the sun would come out and you can see the steam come up and they were starting to lose their fig crop. So, at that time Governor—Reagan was the Governor—and he had a head of the prison system, I think was a man called [inaudible] or something like that and so we saw in the newspapers, or on the radio, or on the T.V., that the fig growers were petitioning the governor to use the prisoners.

So, and they were going to allow to prisoners to go in there and pick the figs because they needed to get the figs off the ground because they were about ready to rot and it was really an emergency. So, we thought, we said, “Man we were in the same boat, because if we don't get the grapes off of there, they're going to rot, and so maybe we should do the same thing.”

So, we checked around who was our State Representative, and at that time, the representative for our area was a man called Quimby, John Quimby, he was the Assemblyman. So, we got together, we spread around the word to all the growers and about 20 or 25 growers met with John Quimby on a—it was like a Thursday afternoon.

DCA: And what year was this around?

VDF: I don't know.

DCA: '60s?

VDF: Yeah, sometime around there. When Governor Reagan was Governor. So, we met in John Quimby's office and we explained to him, we said "Hey, we have this terrible weather condition. It's never been here before, but it's really messing things up. The grapes are going to start to rot and the fig guys are in the same boat. The governor let them pick the figs off the ground so we need prisoners from Chino," and John said, "well if they're doing it for the fig growers, I'll see what I can do for you guys."

The state is always criticized for being slow—and it's true—they are slow when they want to be slow. Because we met with John Quimby on Thursday afternoon. He made a couple phone calls to the state officials. I think he talked to that guy [inaudible], who was the head of the prisons, called him up and he said, "Hey, you're helping the fig growers in Fresno pick the figs, and my guys in San Bernardino, Riverside are in the same boat, grapes. We need the prisoners from Chino to pick the grapes," and he said "You've allowed them. You've approved it for Fresno. You got to approve it for me right now."

So, he said "Okay, we got to get the paperwork done." So that was on a Thursday. They work Friday—whatever they needed to do in Sacramento—they did that on Friday. We met with the prison officials and by Tuesday morning, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. By Tuesday morning, we had 300 prisoners picking grapes.

DCA: What kind of security did you have?

VDF: None. They sent a couple guards. They provided the buses. They provided the lunches. They provided everything and all they had walkie-talkies—no guns, no clubs, no nothing. They just told the guys "if you want to run, run." But they told them, "they're not going to go anywhere."

They were—we had 300 prisoners and they helped harvest the grapes, no trouble, no arguments, no fights, no nothing. And like I said, no real security. All they had was walkie-talkies, and they really worked out really good. But the thing that was impressive to me is how fast the state could move when the state wants to. I mean with just a couple phone calls, minimum paperwork, bang boom, bang boom, and there it is. And it was really a big help. But, the other side of that is that the labor unions found out about it and they filed an injunction and the court ordered an injunction. So, you can't do that anymore in the state of California, that was like a one-time phenomenon.

DCA: One year, one season.

VDF: But it helped the fig growers and it helped us. It was really a benefit that they were able to do that, and it was good for everybody. Now, I don't know whatever happened to the—

because as I remember it, we had to pay. We paid—I don't know if we paid, I guess we paid the state. It wasn't free labor; we had to pay. And we had to pay them the same as we paid everybody else. But I think the money went to the state as I remember it, to the institution, because I know we had to pay them, so we paid them. It wasn't free so, but what benefit the prisoners got, I don't know, maybe they got nothing out of it, I don't know.

End of Vito DeVito Francesco Part 1 of 3.

Beginning of Vito DeVito Francesco Part 2 of 3.

VDF: You know like I said, they were nice guys. They were prisoners. They were down at the states', so they were felons. They weren't misdemeanor things. But you know, you talk to them and they seem like really nice guys. In fact, being kind of a curious guy, I asked this one guy and said—because I was out there running this particular crew, because my dad wanted me to be there to make sure I would be a little more attentive than anybody else. So, I wasn't running in charge of that operation while it was going on.

So, I asked this one guy and said, "Gee," I said, "you know, you guys all seem like really nice guys." And I said, "Especially you—you know—you seem like a really nice guy. How did you get yourself in this hot water?"

He said, "Well I'll tell you. We were down in San Diego, three of us. We had been partying and we ran out of money." He says, "We wanted to continue partying, so nobody got any money."

So far [the] story seems okay. But somebody in the car had a candle. [I asked] "A candle? What's a candle?"

He says, "A gun. So, there was a liquor store available, so we decided to go hold up the liquor store."

And they got caught. I just shook my head. They did seem like really nice guys. And like I said, they were polite. They did what they were supposed to do. They were all laughing and kidding and having a good time, and we got the crop [inaudible]. It was a real educational experience because I learned a lot. I learned how the state can move when the state wants to move. This nonsense about how this takes a long time. It's true but I think when they want to move, they can move. But they don't move very often. But that was a real learning experience for me.

DCA: I was thinking about your grape growing aspect of your operation. How did you learn the cultural practice? Where did you—how did your dad get his knowledge of how to grow grapes and manage a vineyard?

VDF: In Europe, both my father and grandfather, that's what they did. They were involved with grapes.

DCA: Where did they come from?

VDF: In Italy.

DCA: What part?

VDF: In Bari, B-A-R-I, which is southern part of Italy. And they had grapes and olives and that's basically what they were doing. They were farming grapes and olives in Italy, but they wanted to come to the United States. And when they came to the United States, the only occupation they knew—was that they could get a job—and they were lucky they'd be hired, was laying railroad tracks. That's what everybody did. And then from there, they still had this desire to get back into agriculture. And the only other place they knew to go was in Coachella because that's where they needed people to work. And that's where my dad ended up and he—in one period of time—even here when he was in California, he was in the olive business, he—

DCA: Did he have any relationship with the [grower?] olives in Ontario?

VDF: No. As I remember, the olive operation he had was in the San Fernando Valley, and he had some olive trees up there. I think he was running a olive ranch because they used to have a lot of olives in San Fernando Valley. And then he made olive oil a couple years, and but then he didn't pursue the olive oil thing. He just stayed with the grapes. I think he was only in the olive business for a year or two.

DCA: So, his father, his grandfather, they knew how to raise grapes?

VDF: Right. It was all from—that was what the family did.

DCA: So, they just passed that down and you learned that as well.

VDF: I just learned by observation. I've never had an agriculture course in my life.

DCA: Can you describe some of the things that were done at that time?

VDF: Well at that time, there were more intense farming. I mean as you can see by the pictures you were looking at, they used to have bigger equipment. They used to have big discs, they used to have French plows.

DCA: You were looking at our Caterpillar tractor collection photos.

VDF: Right, but I mean the land was farmed intensively. You were always doing something to the vineyards. You were either using your disc or you'd put the French plow in.

DCA: The disc was used in what aspect?

VDF: To churn up the ground, kill the weeds and to plow the ground to make it aeriated and get the weeds out of the way and that stuff. But over time, because the area changed then you couldn't do that, the air pollution people didn't want you to use the disc because it created too much dust. So instead, they eliminated the use of the disc. So, then you had to use what is called

a noble blade, which is just a V-shaped blade that goes underneath the soil and it cuts about maybe two, about three inches, maybe four inches underneath. And what would happen was that it'd cut the roots, and then the grass or the weeds would fall back down. So, this was supposed to be, well you—

DCA: Conserve your topsoil.

VDF: Conserve the topsoil and not create air pollution. Because when the winds blew—and then the sand dust would blow all over. So, that was one thing. And then there used to be very little irrigation because before in this area there used to be a lot of rain. It was known as a dry farm area. Dry farm meaning you don't use water for irrigation, but mother nature used to supply a lot of rainwater on a regular basis. So, the farmers would rely on the rain to farm their crops and it was great. But then the weather patterns changed and now there's very little rain. So, you can't do that anymore, or you have to irrigate.

Well water is very expensive and there aren't many wells; to drill a well is very expensive so that's changed. They used to use a lot more pesticides when I was younger. I remember DDT was a very-favored commodity; well that caused a lot of damage to various parts of the environment so they stopped using DDT. Then the farmers started getting cutworms and more different kinds of things that interrupted with the growing of the grapes.

So, it's a tradeoff. You do something good for the environment, make it a little rougher for the grower. But things have changed, and you got to keep up with the way things are. And the pesticides that they have today are not very potent. They might be good for the environment, but they don't really get the job done. They have to come up with more and more and different kinds to try to make them as strong or stronger. Because the various parts of the agricultural world changes and it seems like that the insects get smarter than you. And so, you have to keep—it's a battle between the wits of the insects and the wits of man. You have to be a step ahead of them. There has been a lot of changes in the agricultural field and how you farm.

DCA: Did you ever have any trouble from the glassy winged sharpshooter that has caused so trouble in recent years?

VDF: Yeah, well that was something that you just kind of lived with. I mean, nobody seems to know what to do with that.

DCA: That was recognized pest while you were farming?

VDF: Yeah, right, there was nothing you could do. And another thing about that particular problem, is that it lives in orange trees, or it lives in citrus. It doesn't hurt the citrus, but it lives in the citrus. Well, because there is so much citrus around here, and also in Rancho Cucamonga. And then you got vineyards and citrus that are side by side. It's just an invitation that they can't say no to. They live in the citrus and damage the vineyards. They live in the citrus and damage the vineyards, so, it probably would have been better if they had not planted citrus or not planted vineyards, to have two separate areas or something. But because the citrus and the vineyards

were so close together, that's probably one problem that it kind of created, or helped create the problem.

DCA: Tell us about the wineries that you supplied grapes to.

VDF: Well at one time, there was—in this—in the Cucamonga area, I understand there were like 15 or 16 operating wineries. And so, in those days, what the people would do is, you'd raise your grapes and you'd sell. You take the grapes to whichever winery needed them. You know somebody need them because everybody was friends with everybody. But over the years there were fewer and fewer wineries. And so, you came down to—there was the Gallo plant, which was called Gallo plant on Arrow Highway cause the Gallo Winery took that plant over, so that was your number one.

DCA: They were the largest.

VDF: They were the largest and the biggest and the ones that needed the most. And the good thing about that is that they could crush or accept your grapes. Crush them, store them in the tank, and then they had to [inaudible], to take the juice from the tank, truck it up north which gave them more capacity here so they could take in more grapes. The other wineries didn't have all that luxuries. They had a certain amount of tankage so they could take in X amount of tons. Once they accepted that then they were out of room. So, but Gallo had that other feature that [if] they could take in grapes, they'd make it into juice and then store the juice and then can take the juice out and in consequently would have more room to take in more grapes. So, that was the number one purchaser in this area: the Gallo plant.

DCA: Was this during the late 1950s and 1960s?

VDF: '50s, '60s, '70s. Yeah, they were there. And then, you know, Brookside used to take in a lot of grapes also, because they were a big operation. Basically, they had their own growers. They had a kind of a like, a family of growers that used to supply Brookside. And if their member growers couldn't supply them, then they ask other people to bring them. But they had practically—they—although they used up a lot of the crop, they had their own people, so.

And then there was the Regina Winery on Base Line [Road], Johnny Ellena's winery. They used to take in a lot of grapes too, and we took grapes up there. So, over the years, we basically took grapes to Regina, we took grapes to Gallo, and we took grapes to Brookside.

DCA: Now what about—we were looking at photographs of the Padre Winery.

VDF: Oh yeah. Yeah, we took grapes there to Padre when they—when the Vai brothers were there. But then after the Vai brothers passed away and Caesar Vai took over, then they basically became a champagne house as it's called. They concentrated only on champagne and they really didn't need too much grapes from the Cucamonga to make their champagne because they would get white juice from up north. But they did take in some local grapes with—not at an any substantial amount, just a small amount. But when Vai brothers were around, then they took in a great deal of grapes in those days.

DCA: Tell us about the type of grapes that you—what varieties did you raise?

VDF: Well basically, the greatest variety was Zinfandel.

DCA: You were telling me about that—tell that—if you can say that again.

VDF: Well Zinfandel was like the grape that really made the Cucamonga area; was Zinfandel, and it was one reason why it was in so much demand was that, the Zinfandel was used for shipping purposes, for home winemaking purposes. And they used to go back east to Chicago or Boston, and some would go to Canada.

And the reason it was in demand was that the families back there used to like [to] make home wine for their families. And in those days, I think you could make 200 gallons per family. And then it all depends how you define family, so you make more. But anyhow, 200 gallons per family or per person whatever it is, and they, the people that bought our [inaudible], basically the French and the Italian people that liked that atmosphere, liked to do that.

And they recognized Zinfandel because that was what they remembered from Europe, because Zinfandel was kind of like the grandfather grape in Europe. So, they recognized Zinfandel and the grapes from Cucamonga. The Zinfandel [grapes] from Cucamonga had a characteristic that they could really travel well in the railroad car, because of the climate we have here, and the soil and because they were non-irrigated. So, the skin would [be] nice and tough, and that gave you the advantage that when people pick the grapes, [the grapes] could handle it because each bunch had to be picked and then you had to pack it.

You couldn't just throw it in the box, it had to come up to 36 pounds. And the box would be in the field on a scale. And the person who harvested it had to give each individual bunch, put it in the box, not throw them in the box, they had to pack it. So, that they could get enough bunches in there that it would come up to 36 pounds. And then the guy would come along and put a lid on the box. And that whole process—you needed a type of grapes that could handle, that could take that much handling and the skin on the Zinfandel grape could handle that. At least the Zinfandel grape from Cucamonga could, and that's why that why it was such a great commodity. And that's what made the Cucamonga Valley very important, was because of that Zinfandel.

DCA: You mentioned also, the non-irrigated factor.

VDF: Right, well the fact that it was non-irrigated, in fact if you look on the shipping labels, it used to say right on the shipping label; non-irrigated. The reason why that was so important, it didn't mean it was absolutely dry, it meant you did not add water to it in the growing process, because if you do, you end up with bigger berries. But you end up with more water and the fruit would have less flavor. And there'd be less fruit in there. You'd have more water and you wouldn't have that strong Zinfandel taste and that's why non-irrigated was more valuable. That's what the market wanted.

If you put “irrigated” on there, or if the consumer knew that it was irrigated, they wouldn’t buy it. They would rather have non-irrigated. So, that was very important. But again, you get back to the climate. It was important for the rain because mother nature gave you enough rain to where you could have a good crop but still not pump the fruit up too much where you have an abundance of water. So, the climate, the soil, the variety, everything was great and that’s what made the area really good, but then things change.

The Italian families and French families, they lost interest in it, in the old days, Columbus Day was kind of height of the market, because all these people would get together to celebrate Columbus, and the way they celebrated Columbus was they have parades. And they grab their grapes that they purchase, and families get together. They crush the grapes. They make a big family holiday out of it. And it was tradition; this is how we celebrate Columbus. It was another excuse to make the wine, and get everybody together, because everybody would pitch in. Everybody would help crush and do whatever is necessary in order to make the wine.

The old-timers liked that, but the newer generation, they don’t want to fool around making wine and crushing it and fermenting it and cleaning up afterward. You know, you go to a store and buy a gallon of wine for a couple of dollars, now why would anyone want to do that? So, over time the demand for Zinfandel went downhill and—

DCA: You were saying earlier, when people knew how valuable, that you were getting such a high price for the non-irrigated Zinfandel but then they ended up grafting over and planting so much more.

VDF: What happened was that—that phenomenon that I went through—created a big demand for Zinfandel at that time. But as the demand went down because the families changed their interest and didn’t want to go through that, then Zinfandel kind of became a drag on the market because nobody really wanted it. Or it wasn’t really wanted as much. But then another phenomenon comes along called white Zinfandel. The reason why white Zinfandel came along was because a lot of the growers were stuck with it, you know, because what are we going to do with it? It’s a good grape. It makes good wine, but the public doesn’t really recognize it.

So, one of the winemakers in California, I forget which one it was it, decided well we’ll do something different. We’ll get the Zinfandel; we’ll make a white Zinfandel, which had never been done before because Zinfandel was considered a hearty red wine. So, this guy tries his white Zinfandel thing. Well it became like the hula-hoop. I mean everybody wanted white Zinfandel. And consequently, the price of Zinfandel went from like 50 dollars a ton to 500 dollars a ton overnight. And it was all because of white Zinfandel, they couldn’t get enough of it. Whereas the night before you couldn’t give it away, now everybody wants it.

So, that was a fantastic phenomenon but it only lasted a couple years because everybody figured, well if Zinfandel was such a great commodity, we’re going to start planting it. Well if you’re planting them, it takes you like four years before you get a good crop. So, they said, well we’ll graft. We’ll start grafting the vineyards we have. And we’ll change the varieties and graft them to Zinfandel and that way we’ll only lose a year maybe. Well, instead of losing a year, in a

couple of years, they ended up with a full crop, so they went like from 15,000 tons, or 15,000 acres of Zinfandel to 30,000 acres of Zinfandel.

DCA: For the state?

VDF: Yeah, and so that was just a tremendous jump. So, then you ended up with a tremendous amount of Zinfandel and it was too much for the market. So, the prices came way down again. So, it was a real rollercoaster ride where Zinfandel went from nothing, to really high, and back down to nothing again, but that's the way agriculture is. It's feast or famine.

DCA: You mentioned Zinfandel, what were some other varieties that you happened to grow?

VDF: Well in this area here, basically, the farmers again, the vineyards are old. They were planted way back when, and they planted the varieties that they knew from the old country, which you had a variety called Mataro, which is a good variety but it's an old variety. You have Carignan which is an old variety. You had Alicante. You had Zinfandel. We had another variety called Golden Chassela or Palomino, same thing. And then they had another variety called Burger and that's about the varieties I'm familiar with. Grenache, there was a lot of Grenache. But those are the varieties that I'm familiar with in this area, and those are the older varieties. Today I don't know if they're even planting any more of those in the state.

DCA: [Inaudible].

VDF: Zinfandel is still there, but the other ones, I don't know. Mataro, I've seen.

DCA: Mourvedre.

VDF: Yeah, Mourvedre, or something like that. They have a different French name for it, but I think they might be trying to bring that one back. But now the Burger grape, Burgers are white grape and makes excellent champagne. And that's the one year we sold the Burger grapes to Korbel Winery and they use it to make champagne. And Korbel is an excellent champagne company, but I don't even know if there's any Burger in the state anymore. But it's one of the better varieties, but there used to a lot of it here in Cucamonga but no more.

DCA: Tell me, did you participate in what was the Cucamonga Grape Harvest Festival?

VDF: Yeah, in fact, I think one year we won a blue ribbon. My dad's grapes won a blue ribbon.

DCA: Was it for the—?

VDF: But there used to be a big festival once a year.

DCA: Was it for the Zinfandel?

VDF: I don't remember if it was for Zinfandel or for one of the other varieties, but I think he won a blue ribbon one year. And that was—they used to have a festival.

DCA: Tell us about your memories of those festivals.

VDF: There used to be a festival that they had once a year in Cucamonga.

DCA: Where was it located?

VDF: Well that I can't remember because I was—that was a little bit before my time, but I know it was Cucamonga. And all the grape growers would pick the grapes and put them into the boxes and take them to the festival. And then they'd have a judging contest and the judges would pick like first, second, and third prize. And then in those days what they do is they take the prize winners and they take them to the fair and they be—

DCA: California State Fair?

VDF: No, at Pomona [Los Angeles County] Fair.

DCA: Pomona.

VDF: At Fairplex. And they'd be on exhibit there at one of the buildings and it would say First Prize Winner Cucamonga Fair, or whatever it was.

DCA: So, your family would enter some fruit?

VDF: Yeah, my dad. I remember that one year that he won the blue ribbon. But like I said, I really didn't partake in any of that. That was a little bit before I got involved. But I remember that. It was a big thing in those days.

But see in those days everybody knew each other, it was like one big happy family. So, if John did it well, I'm going to do it. It was all kind of a different atmosphere. Today they have the fair but it's more of a—I don't know what you call it—a social event. I don't know if any grape growers really participate in it. It's more or less a reason to get everybody together to sell hot dogs or something.

DCA: Tell us about your family's association with the Cucamonga Growers and Vintners Association.

VDF: Well we were members of the Cucamonga Growers and Vintners.

DCA: What years? Does, all of the, from 1940s through—

VDF: Yeah, we were always a member but again I really don't, other than being a member, I really don't—

DCA: You didn't attend any meetings?

VDF: I remember going to a couple of dinners. There used to be a banquet that they used to have like once a year, and I went a couple of times. Other than that, I don't remember attending any meetings or being active in it or anything like that, but I remember there was an organization.

DCA: What type—do you remember what types of things they would do as an organization?

VDF: Other than being a member, I really don't remember. I don't have any recollection of that, other than knowing that they existed.

DCA: Was your family part of any other industry association?

VDF: Well the California Grape Growers Association [California Association of Wine Grape Growers]. I was one of the founding directors of that organization.

DCA: When were you—?

VDF: Well, whenever it started. It started when things were bad because the reason for the California Grape Growers Association [California Association of Wine Grape Growers] was there was an oversupply of grapes at that time in California. There were like I don't know, just a tremendous amount of acreage because everybody planted grapes for whatever reason.

And so, a man by the name Ralph Bunje—and I forget the other—Ralph was the one who really came up with the ideas I remember. And I think the first president of the organization was a man from Northern California, from Oakland. His name was Richard McKeen—no, Keen—Richard Keen, and he was the first president.

The whole idea was that we needed an association for educational purposes to educate the growers as to what the market could take because just planting grapes and raising grapes or planting vineyards and raising grapes is not going to do you any good if you can't sell them. So, if the market, let's say needs, for example, 100,000 acres of grapes and you plant 200,000 acres, what are you going to do with them.?

So, the whole idea was to educate to produce information for the growers so the growers would know, that this is what the market can handle, and this is what you guys are planning. So, use some common sense, don't overplant, don't overproduce. And they went through all kinds of other scenarios that you could try convincing the farmers to—I forgot what they call it—they have a technical term for it, where you throw some of the crop away, you raise half, but only, I mean you raise a certain percentage of your crop you would not harvest.

They didn't like that idea. Farmers don't like doing that. So anyhow, but anyhow it was supposed to be for educational purposes and today its really doing a lot of good. They have scholarships. They have educational seminars. They sponsor legislation. I mean, they're really active. And it's the California Association of Wine Grape Growers.

DCA: And you helped to found that?

VDF: Yes, I was one of the founding directors. I represented the Cucamonga area.

DCA: Are you continuing to have an—?

VDF: I just get their—I'm not involved with them anymore. I just, they keep me on their mailing list because I'm one of the founding directors but that's about it. And I would assume that the people that I was with are probably no longer there, because I was the young kid on the block at that time.

DCA: About what time was that founded?

VDF: Probably in the '70s. I would say '70s, '80s maybe.

DCA: So, you were still involved with the grape growing in the 1970s. You said that you took over from your dad around 1970 when his vision started to go and then you continued to oversee vineyards?

VDF: Yeah, until we quit. Whenever that white Zinfandel phenomenon came in—that's—we were there for there for two more years and that was it. But things happen so fast. It's hard to keep a timeline but the California Association of Wine Grape Growers has done a lot of good for the industry.

For that purpose, to just kind of educate the growers and bigger and bigger growers have become members. First it started out with the little growers but then as the Association took off, now they have bigger growers. As long as the big growers will pay attention to the information, that's what really controls or helps control the situation because the little guy, he doesn't have much influence, but you get somebody who starts farming 23,000 acres at a crack, they're going to have a big say in what the market conditions are going to be.

DCA: Do you have other memories of leading wine people or grape growers that come to your mind? People that you knew through industry associations?

VDF: I think Philo Biane probably did a great deal of good for this area. He not only had a big winery operation, but they did a great service to the area about actually merchandising the wine at the end product, because they had a lot of wine stores.

And they covered a large area and so a lot of people knew about the Brookside Wines. And they knew that it came from Cucamonga, so the connection there was really influential. I think it really helped the area. And it's too bad that for whatever reason it hasn't continued. But, you know, areas change, things change, you can't—and then the Filippi Winery here, Gino Filippi. He has a lot of good ideas and he's a real go-getter, really enthusiastic. If Gino had been around 100 years ago the whole area would probably still be going great but he's a very enthusiastic fellow and he's got great ideas and he's probably taking the baton from—

End of Vito DeVito Francesco Part 2 of 3.

Beginning of Vito DeVito Francesco Part 3 of 3.

VDF: [Inaudible], Gino, Gino is a real good businessperson and he has a lot of ideas. And I think that if he continues, he's probably going really do a lot of good for Cucamonga and Cucamonga grapes and the wine and everything. Because he has good ideas and he's got a good heart, and I think he's really energetic. I think he's going to do a lot of good for the area and I hope he continues.

I know a lot of times, if you don't get cooperation from people around you, sometimes it's hard to keep going. I just hope that everybody supports him and his ideas. He's doing a really good job.

DCA: I know that he's been quite active within the city of Rancho Cucamonga, and strategic [inaudible] helped certain.

VDF: I think he does the historical preservation and that type of thing. And with the arts—I think he's involved with the arts and things. He has a lot of good ideas. He's energetic, and I just hope he continues. And I hope he gets support from other people because you can't do it alone. You got to have support.

DCA: Are there other vintners or grape growers that you have had close dealings with that you care to speak about?

VDF: Well, you know, I remember Johnny Ellena from the Ellena Brothers Winery or Regina Winery on Base Line [Road]. We used to do business with him and with Gallo. We used to do business with Gallo. They were fine people. They did a lot of good for this area. The Vai Brothers—we did business with Vai [inaudible] with Caesar Vai. We did business with Philo Biane and Brookside.

DCA: What about later years? Or in fact I think it was in the 1960s, Brookside did start planting some vineyards down in the Temecula area and launched that area. Do you have any connections with that area?

VDF: As I remember it, Philo and Brookside, they were one of the very first people to plant their vineyards down there. They were like one of the pioneers for that area because everybody was skeptical that, that area could really thrive. And I guess they proved that you could have good vineyards and raise good grapes and make good wine. So, you got to give them a little credit for sticking their neck out.

And then Calloway went down there and then he kind of put the area on the map because he went in and he did all kinds of things that, because he was retired and he had a lot of money so he could do things on a first class basis. And because of his efforts, I think he's the one that really, after what Brookside did, that he was the next guy to really put the frosting on the cake. From there on that area just really blossomed.

But Calloway went to the extent, as far as I know the story goes, he hired one of the consultants to the generals who advised the generals where to drop their bombs based on air currents. So, he paid to have that area mapped, so that they could map the air currents or where the air currents would come. Because they take advantage of the sea breezes. So, he planted his vineyards to take advantage of the air currents.

And then he went into this night harvesting so that the grapes would—you'd harvest them at night so they'd be cooler. That way when you crush them, there wouldn't be as much heat in the juice. It would make it easier on the fermenters, and they wouldn't have to work as hard. So, you'd end up with a cooler fermentation. Because fermentation makes heat and if the stuff is hot when it comes in—they claim you get a better tasting wine if it ferments at a lower temperature.

The average guy on the street couldn't do that. You need somebody with lots of money and he had lots of money. And he had the desire to do it. And because of his connections, when the Queen of England came to have a state dinner in Washington with one of the Presidents, I forget which President it was, but because of Calloway's friendship with the Queen, he asked the Queen to request his wine. So, his wine was served at the dinner because the Queen requested it. That kind of was a big publicity stunt that helped put his label, you know, put it forward.

The average guy can't do that kind of thing, but he did. I think he created a good impression for that area. And as far as I know, they make excellent wine.

DCA: That area has exploded too.

VDF: It's really grown there. A lot of wineries down there now and a lot of vineyards. And they've gone into this bed and breakfast thing. And they have a lot of Sunday brunches and that type of thing.

DCA: Were you acquainted with the grape growers down in Escondido area or others more south?

VDF: No, no. I know they have some down there or used to have some, but I never really had anything to do with them down there in that area.

DCA: Do you have any family memorabilia about your grape growing days? Anything left over? We'd love to have another label.

VDF: Well, there was a—on Archibald, there is a park there and many years ago it was like the county park. I guess it's still county, but there was a museum, a grape growers museum that was supposed to be on that park.

In fact, it was there for a while and the museum consisted of a great big redwood tank, wine tank. And it was one of the biggest ones. It must have been, I don't know how big, but it was a tremendous wine tank. And that was going to be, or it was, the Cucamonga Growers Museum. And it was there for a number of years. I don't know how many.

And Joe Filippi asked me for a label because they were going to put labels in there. And I gave Joe Filippi a label, but it was a Zinfandel label. Right here where it says Alicante, when I gave him it said Zinfandel. And I thought I had more left but apparently that was my last one. That I gave to Joe and Joe put it in that museum and now that museum is gone and Joe is gone.

DCA: Do you think the contents were preserved and went over to the Filippi Winery? Because they have a very nice display of things from there.

VDF: I checked with Filippi and he said he thinks—because I asked him. I said I'd like to have that label back because it's the last one I had. And I [inaudible], I gave it to Joe and Joe put in the museum. And I asked Gino, I said, hey do you happen to have that? He said no. The best that he remembers is that everything from there went over to the county museum in San Bernardino. So, I told him I'm going to drive over there one of these days, and check it out, and see if I can get that label back. So as far as Gino's concerned, everything that was in that museum ended up in the San Bernardino County Museum. So, I'm going to go there and see what they have.

DCA: I've seen a very large tank that's over at the—I think they call it the Cucamonga-Guasti Regional Park that's on Vineyard.

VDF: That's where the Grape Growers Museum was.

DCA: That's was where it was. Okay, and so the tank still is there.

VDF: Well I wasn't aware of that. I thought they tore it down.

DCA: I believe I've seen it there.

VDF: If it's still there, that was the museum. I don't know if there's anything inside it. It might be interesting to get a key if there's a lock on it. To go in and see what's there. That might be if it's still there.

DCA: I thought that I'd seen it, maybe I'm remembering wrongly, but I might have to drive by there.

VDF: If it's there and if it's has a door on it, it'd be interesting to see what's in it.

DCA: At one time, I thought that—because we have some postcards of the Thomas Winery, which at the time was under the administration of the Filippi family, and it looked as though they had on their postcard a large—must've been a redwood tank that you go inside.

VDF: Well I don't know.

DCA: One thing you had mentioned earlier was that not only did you submit your grapes to the local wineries that you mentioned but they would make wine for you. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

VDF: What happens is that, a grower has a choice after you raise your crop. You can either sell it to the winery, to a winery, or you can pay the winery to use your grapes to make wine for you. And then you hold the wine. You pay a storage fee and then you sell the wine. And that gives you a different choice. It all depends on what you want to do. If you think the price of wine is going to go up, well then you could convert your grapes into wine. You have to pay a fee to winery and then they make the grapes into the wine.

And then you have to pay them a storage fee as they store it for you until you sell it.

And then you can sell it, and there are wine brokers in California who would sell it for you, just like real-estate brokers [inaudible]. And that's called the bulk wine business. What you're doing is you're just making bulk wine and then you sell it through a broker. Or you can do it yourself. You don't have to go through a broker, but you just sell to another winery, and then that winery would, in turn, use it in its bottling and—

DCA: Was this involvement in bulk wine, was that something your family was involved in all along?

VDF: We did a number of times, but normally you do it when you think that the price of grapes were too low. Let's assume that you think that the price of grapes should be one hundred dollars a ton and you could only sell them for fifty. Well, you figure that's too big of a difference. So, I'll just pay a little extra and have the grapes turned into wine and hold the wine for a while. And then I'll be able to sell the wine at a higher price and make up the difference.

You're just taking a business risk. There's no guarantee that you're going to come out making more but at least if you think you have a chance. You'd do it that way or you can just sell the grapes for whatever you can get now and either make a profit or take your lumps as of that time. So, it just gives you a different option.

It's not something that's a sure bet, you're just gambling on the market conditions because it's going to cost you more. Because you got the money you tied up in raising the crop. And then you got to pay the fee for the winery to make it into the wine. And then you got to pay the storage fee. And the storage fee was usually on a monthly basis. Every month you hold it, you're paying more money out. And there comes a time where you can't keep doing that forever.

DCA: Was it the same wineries that you mentioned earlier that you would then offer that wine to?

VDF: Well yeah, you could offer the wine. Sometimes the winery that makes it will actually buy it back from you later on. Or, I said you can contact one of the wine brokers in California and they'll end up selling it for you.

DCA: So, you used both approaches?

VDF: But a lot of times, what the wineries does is, they'll say well we don't have money to buy grapes from you right now. But if you let us crush the grapes, pay us the fee for crushing it, and

then pay us storage while we store it—and then when we get our cash, comes back up then we'll be able to buy the wine from you.

So, you're kind of helping out the winery too with its cash position because they don't have to give you the cash at the front end. And in the meantime, you pay them a little for crushing and a little for storage, and they're not just doing this for you. They're doing it for other people. And in the process, their cash balances go up and then they can afford to pay you for the wine, which was another way of buying the grapes. So, that works out too. You kind of help each other get through the rough spots. But it's—or you can pay to have it crushed and then call the wine brokers and say sell it for me.

DCA: So, you did it all.

VDF: Yeah, we did both.

DCA: Approach whichever made sense at the time. Well is there anything else you would like to talk about that we haven't discussed yet?

VDF: No—it's just that—another thing I just happen to see is those pictures. That when Johnny Ellena had the winery on Base Line [Road], he fell in love with these little miniature horses. And those miniature horses were used in the mines to bring the ore carts in and out of the mines.

DCA: Which mines were they?

VDF: The mines in South America somewhere. Johnny Ellena found out about these little horses. They weren't ponies, they were actually miniature horses, and they were used for that purpose to take ore carts into the mine and then bring them out of the mine. And Johnny Ellena really liked those little horses. I think he had ten or twelve that he wanted to bring into the country, which he ended up doing.

But it cost him an arm and a leg. He had to go through all kinds of quarantines and all kinds of things. They had to build a barn for them and everything. He spent a fortune on those little horses, but they were really something that the families used to come out with their children [for] and they'd spend more time with the horses than they would with the winery. So, he really—that was a great thing. He did it for the loves of the horses, but it turned out that he really did a good thing for the public.

DCA: Attraction.

VDF: It was an attraction and the families really enjoyed it. Because he used to have a little picnic area out there and the families would actually come out and have a picnic and spend time with the horses. And then I guess also buy wine, but I thought that was really nice that he would go through all that trouble for those little horses. But he really enjoyed those little horses. They were really cute. And they were really horses. They weren't ponies, but they're just miniature.

DCA: Well those postcards with their photos—it looks as though he used some large wine tanks as little stables.

VDF: That's one thing about the people and the wine business. It seems like that there—I don't know about other businesses, but from my experience, a good portion of them are people that have really strong ties to the community and doing things that are good for the community. Like Johnny with those little horses. Philo with the wine stores and bringing all the families into their picnic areas and that type of thing. And Gino and all the things he's doing with art and preservation and that kind of thing. And this guy Richard Keen that I talked about in the California Wine Grape Growers Association [California Association of Wine Grape Growers]. He really loved the arts and he would invite people to his house and have a concert pianist and play the piano for his guests. You know, people that really enjoy life and seems like that wine attracts this type or vice versa.

Or Calloway. He didn't get into the wine business because he wanted to make money. He had enough money. But he wanted to do something that was good, something that brought enjoyment and do something good for the area. He built a winery. He had people come out for picnics and that kind of stuff. So, I think it's a business that lends itself to people that are, that want to make a profit, but they want something else. It's not just profit motive. It's not like dollars and cents, although dollars and cents are really important. But for some reason it attracts people that want to do something a little bit more for the community.

Take Janine Biane. I'm sure she's not doing it for the money. She's probably got more money than she needs, but she's got this sherry operation there, and she opens it up for the public. Come in, she explains how the sherry is made. They have fundraisers there for charitable things. She's doing a lot of charitable work.

I think it just lends to that type of person. I don't know what it is. Maybe—I don't know—but it seems like that there, the people in the wine business or the grape business are in it for more than just the profit. There's got to be something more to it, because if it was just to make money, then probably do something else.

End of Vito DeVito Francesco Part 3 of 3.

End of interview.

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